

SOME WINTER BIRDS OF THE SEASON 1908-9 IN  
WAYNE COUNTY, MICHIGAN.

BY J. CLAIRE WOOD.

THE winter of 1908-9 developed some ornithological features of more than ordinary interest. The Evening Grosbeaks came nearly to our northern border, while at the St. Clair Flats Mr. Bryant says that the ducks, mainly Canvas-backs and Redheads, wintered in countless numbers; their abundance exceeding that of any former year within his recollection, and this statement is corroborated by Mr. John Krauss, who also informs me that he caught three King Rails near his hotel early in February, 1909, which are the first he has seen in winter, though I know of a previous record from that vicinity.

Here, in Wayne County, we had a flight of Pine Siskins, and more Redpolls than in any previous season, but a surprising scarcity of other northern visitors, such as Snowflakes and Northern Shrikes. The southward movement of Redpolls and Siskins began in early October, before the least suggestion of cold or snow, but the Snowflakes did not appear until early December, and then only about a dozen individuals were seen by Mr. Swales on Grosse Isle, and none on the mainland until February 18, when large flocks came in the wake of the most severe snow storm of the season and were gone on the 21st.

With an excess of certain northern visitors we would not expect unusual numbers of such birds as Song Sparrows and Meadowlarks, but more were seen than during any previous year. This was not due to abnormal meteorological conditions. During the winter of 1906-7 I gave the birds an amount of attention equal to the present season. Snowflakes and Northern Shrikes were common all winter. In December and January ten Song Sparrows and one Meadowlark were seen, while in the corresponding months of the present season I noted 41 of the former and about 125 of the latter, and yet the weather conditions were very similar during the two seasons. The mean temperature (Fahrenheit) was as follows,—November 1906 and 1908 were both 40°; December 1906, 29°

and 1908, 30°; January 1907, 26° and 1909, 29°. It is natural to suppose that only exceptional high temperature and clear weather induces the more hardy summer residents to linger into December but this is not borne out by facts. November was decidedly unpleasant with a total wind movement of 11,474 miles, three inches of snow and only six clear days. December 2 and 3 were the coldest days of the month, except the 8th, and the snowfall for the month was only 2.4 inches less than the average for 25 years, while January was 1.3 inches more than the average. This meteorological summary was kindly furnished me by the local station of the United States Weather Bureau.

The flight of certain northern visitors in connection with unusual numbers of two hardy summer residents presents an interesting problem but this is further complicated by the occurrence of Bobolinks and a Vesper Sparrow; two birds never before noted here in winter.

Everything considered, I cannot see where the birds were directly influenced by temperature, nor does food scarcity explain the flight of Siskins, for the bulk left an abundant supply here to pass further south; in fact, the only case of evident cause was deep snow covering the food supply of the Snowflakes, and a second cause happens when the lake freezes entirely over, forcing out the winter ducks.

In compiling the following list of winter birds I have considered only the months of December and January, for the reason that I was not afield enough in February to get a proper idea of relative abundance. It includes only such birds as for some reason possess a marked interest. The majority of permanent residents, ranging from Bobwhite to Chickadee, are omitted, together with visitors of unfailing winter occurrence, as the Ring-billed and Herring Gulls; also, the ducks, though the following were more or less common: Redhead, Golden-eye, Lesser and Greater Scaup and American Merganser.<sup>1</sup> In company with Mr. Herbert H. Spicer I devoted a

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<sup>1</sup> It is not always possible to get satisfactory data on the local ducks. We will take the Canvas-backs as an example. I know that more than five hundred were taken last winter at the St. Clair Flats. This means that a hundred or more were crippled and escaped by diving. April 18 the deputy game warden told me that while crossing Baltimore Bay the previous day he counted 76 winged Canvas-backs. All the ducks of this species able to make the journey had long since left for the north. None of these cripples breed at the Flats, so far as I can learn, but they are present

part of each Sunday to field work during the two months under consideration. The territory selected was a part of P. C. 120 and 321, City of Detroit, and P. C. 696, Grosse Pointe Park; all being in what was formerly the village of Fairview. The following refers to the above locality unless otherwise specified. A star (\*) indicates positive identification. Messrs. Walter C. Wood, Bradshaw H. Swales and Jefferson Butler very kindly furnished me with what data they possessed and I take this opportunity to assure them of my sincere appreciation. Mr. Swales's observations were made on Grosse Isle, Monguagon Township.

1. **Circus hudsonius.** MARSH HAWK.—A junior female appeared December 13 and was last seen January 10. Two primary feathers of the left wing were missing which enabled me to identify all seen on the various dates as the one bird. Mr. W. C. Wood saw a female on Section 29, City of Wyandotte, January 27.

2. **Accipiter cooperi.** COOPER'S HAWK.—A junior female was seen January 1 and 3; probably the same bird both days.

3. **Buteo borealis.** RED-TAILED HAWK.—Mr. Swales writes: "During December from one to three frequented the northerly part of the island and were seen every time I went back to the woods. They were what remained from the large numbers that passed through in October and November."

4. **Buteo lineatus.** RED-SHOULDERED HAWK.—A junior male appeared December 13 and was last seen January 10. December 20 it dropped into a flock of Tree Sparrows but missed its intended victim.

5. **Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis.** AMERICAN ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK.—December 16 a bird, in rather dark plumage, lit in a willow in front of Mr. Swale's residence and was observed at close range.

6. **Haliaeetus leucocephalus.** BALD EAGLE.—Mr. Swales saw a junior bird December 11 flying over the Detroit River.

7. **Falco sparverius.** AMERICAN SPARROW HAWK.—A male appeared December 13 and was last seen January 3. Another male flew down the main street of River Rouge Village, January 13, passing within ten yards of

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throughout the year, usually keeping well out in the lake. Redheads, however, occasionally breed; the general belief being that an uninjured bird remains with a cripple, but it seems more probable that many recover their power of flight and no longer care to migrate. Four pairs of Redheads and two pairs of Lesser Scaups nested near Mr. Krauss's hotel in 1908. This may be considered unusual when compared with the Flats as a whole, and looks like enforced residence, but the facts in this respect will remain unknown and imparts an uncertainty that destroys their scientific value, in my opinion; and an equally confusing tendency is realized when we attempt to fix the dates of arrival and departure by individual bird records and will remain so until duck shooting is prohibited. These conditions also apply, in a measure, to certain species along the water front of Wayne County.

me. Mr. W. C. Wood saw one on Section 29, City of Wyandotte, January 27.

8. *Asio accipitrinus*. SHORT-EARED OWL.—Two owls of this species were flushed on a weed grown area November 8.\* We cut through a corner of this land December 6 and flushed another. We did not again cross this section until February 7 when fresh castings and droppings were noted, and it is reasonable to conclude that at least one bird remained all winter.

9. *Bubo virginianus*. GREAT HORNED OWL.—A male was discovered in a Lombard poplar tree, bordering Lake St. Clair, December 13\*. He was probably a transient from northern wilds where man is little known for the resident birds are educated to a degree of wariness that renders it difficult to approach within gunshot range of them. This bird refused to take wing. He was perched so low that by reaching with the gun from the ground I could almost touch his tail but he merely snapped his mandibles and calmly stared down the barrels. His stomach contained a Norway rat and a white-footed mouse.

10. *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*. RED-HEADED WOODPECKER.—Mr. Butler observed a number on Belle Isle, City of Detroit, December 27, which means that they wintered there. Some winters they are common on this island and again entirely absent. This is probably due to food conditions as they leave with the regular autumn migration prior to such winters as they are absent. This island is the only locality in the county where I have found them in December and January.

11. *Colaptes auratus luteus*. NORTHERN FLICKER.—Mr. Swales saw individuals December 3, 6 and 28; also January 3 and 23. They were in separate pieces of woods near the northerly end of Grosse Isle.

12. *Zenaidura macroura*. MOURNING DOVE.—One bird was seen December 19 by Mr. Swales.

13. *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*. BOBOLINK.—An emaciated male was taken December 6 and a second, in fine condition, on the 20. As to the amount of cold these birds were able to endure and survive I wish to state that the temperature was 18° below freezing December 2 and 3, and 21° below on the 8th.

14. *Molothrus ater*. COWBIRD.—Mr. Swales writes: "Two birds remained during December and, at least, until January 2, feeding with the Song Sparrows in a neighbor's barn yard."

15. *Agelaius phoeniceus*. RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD.—One adult male, in fine condition, December 13\*. Mr. Swales noticed a male throughout December and until January 2 in the marsh along the northeasterly shore of Grosse Isle. The bird called frequently, flew well and seemed uninjured.

16. *Sturnella magna*. MEADOWLARK.—A flock wintered in a grain field near the lake. When first seen, November 22, it consisted of only six birds but this increased to thirteen December 13 and to sixteen on the 20th. This flock remained throughout the winter and disappeared the last week in February, probably returning further north. A specimen taken December 26 was much emaciated, due to gunshot wounds, but

another, together with birds of January 3\* and 20\*, were in very fine condition. All were males. January 20 I made a trip into territory not previously visited during the winter for the purpose of noting this species and found a flock of eight in the southwestern portion of Detroit, and another of seven on P. C. 669, Ecorse Twp., while between 50 and 75 individuals were seen along Baby Creek in Springwells Twp. Mr. W. C. Wood saw three on Section 29, City of Wyandotte, January 27, and a flock of about 40 on Grosse Isle, January 31. Mr. Swales writes: "In the central portion of the island a flock of 25 birds and another of about 40 wintered. They sang freely on clear days. On my way to and from the city I occasionally noted Meadowlarks between Trenton and Ecorse."

17. ***Loxia curvirostra minor***. CROSSBILL.—One flock of 8 in River Rouge Village, December 15. Mr. Swales saw five birds in a pine tree December 5 and three were adult males. Later he found two dead males under the tree.

18. ***Acanthis linaria***. REDPOLL.—I did not notice an autumn flight of Redpolls in numbers and doubt if such occurred in the county. An occasional flock of three or four individuals and about the same number of single birds came in from Lake St. Claire and continued toward the west. December 20\* a flock of thirteen became established and gradually increased to about a hundred on January 10. No further increase occurred until its identity as a flock was obliterated in the numerous flocks of the first northern flight, February 21. I was in River Rouge Village a part of nearly every week day all winter and here, during December, an occasional Redpoll was seen flying westward, apparently having crossed the Detroit River from Canada. The first and only flock consisted of ten birds and took possession of the village January 25. From that time all passing individuals joined the flock and none were seen to leave it. February 4, the flock numbered 50 and soon increased to 64. Late in the afternoon of March 29 I found them very restless and noisy and gone the next morning. Section 24, Monguagon Twp., marks the first turn across Grosse Isle into Canada from the general migration route along Lake Erie. Here on March 7 and 21 we saw numerous small flocks. Mr. Swales writes: "I saw about ten December 10 and from that date three to a dozen were seen almost daily until December 28, after which I failed to see them until early February when they appeared in considerable numbers. Last seen April 10."

19. ***Astragalinus tristis***. GOLDFINCH.—A flock of five established itself November 22 and remained unchanged until February 7 when we found it had increased to twelve, and to about one hundred on the 21st. Last seen March 28, after which it probably took to the woods, as April is the month we find the Goldfinches among the leaf buds in the woods, especially where poplar trees abound.

20. ***Spinus pinus***. PINE SISKIN.—Noted all days afield, from December 6 to January 10\*, in numbers ranging from one to five birds. Seen again, and for the last time, February 21, a flock of four. Mr. Swales writes: "Seen until December 28 but none after that date."

21. **Plectrophenax nivalis.** SNOWFLAKE.—Mr. Swales writes: "Individuals were seen December 7 and 9, and a flock of about ten on the 15th."

22. **Calcarius lapponicus.** LAPLAND LONGSPUR.—A flock of 8 December 13 and two flocks of 7 and 8 December 15, the latter in River Rouge Village. Not seen again until March 22.

23. **Poecetes gramineus.** VESPER SPARROW.—Mr. Swales secured a specimen December 29. It was fat and apparently not injured. This is the only positive winter record.

24. **Junco hyemalis.** SLATE-COLORED JUNCO.—A male was noted near the lake December 13. Mr. Butler saw four in Section 11, Greenfield Twp., December 25. Mr. Swales writes: "A flock of 15 seen December 22, and from two to ten after that date. A flock of 20 January 2, and not noticed again until January 27."

25. **Melospiza melodia.** SONG SPARROW.—Noted on all days afield during the two months in numbers ranging from three to six. Positive records December 20 and 26; also January 1, 10, 17 and 24. Sixty-three percent of these were females and all were in fine condition. Mr. Swales writes that a few were scattered in the river marshes all along the eastern shore and sang freely on clear days.

26. **Cardinalis cardinalis.** CARDINAL.—A male was seen in Woodmere Cemetery, Detroit, January 20, where it probably wintered. Mr. Swales writes: "There was a decided increase in the numbers of this species here this winter and I saw one to four on every field excursion during December and January. I found Cardinals all over the island this winter and certain individuals or pairs could nearly always be found in favorable places."

27. **Lanius borealis.** NORTHERN SHRIKE.—December 15, Mr. W. C. Wood saw one bird while driving between the villages of Ecorse and Taylor Center. Mr. Swales saw one December 28.

28. **Sitta canadensis.** RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH.—Mr. Swales noted three birds in a clump of pines January 2 and another February 11.

29. **Regulus satrapa.** GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET.—One seen December 6 in a cluster of poplars bordering Lake St. Clair, and three in the same locality January 10\*. They were lively and noisy but the male taken was in an emaciated condition. Mr. Swales noted from three to a dozen on a majority of the days during both months.

30. **Planesticus migratorius.** ROBIN.—Several Robins were reported as occurring in the city cemeteries and parks. Mr. Swales writes: "About a dozen wintered in the orchards around my home and were seen throughout December and January."